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SUBJECT: JEM THREATENS TO SHOOT DOWN GOS PLANES IN WEST DARFUR

¶1. (SBU) On December 24 a Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) representative in El Fasher told fieldoff that JEM would shoot down any aircraft flying into its West Darfur territory - specifically El Geneina, Kulbus, Tine, and Saraf Omra - as a way of pre-empting aerial attacks by the Government of Sudan (GoS). The rep claimed that on December 22 the GoS had revived its use of white, unmarked helicopters in the area to transport weapons from Khartoum to its forces fighting with the JEM. Since African Union (AU) and United Nations (UN) aircraft are also white, the JEM advised that all flight plans (AU, UN, NGO) should be cleared through designated JEM field commanders in Jebel Mun in order to avoid being mistakenly shot down. JEM said that it will issue a statement of this plan in Arabic and English to the AU (given to FieldOff on December 24) and will alert UN Department of Safety and Security (UNDSS) and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

¶2. (SBU) The JEM rep also claimed that JEM forces are not surrounding El Geneina or Kulbus at this time and have no immediate plans to attack those cities. He reported that two convoys of GoS forces and Chadian rebels are on the move from Silea to El Geneina, which he warns will further destabilize the West Darfur capital.

¶3. (SBU) FieldOff made clear that the threat to shoot down planes arbitrarily carried with it potentially disastrous consequences, not only in terms of potential civilian collateral damage but also in terms of JEM's credibility. FieldOff will continue to reinforce this message and to urge refraining from any violent acts.

¶4. (SBU) The JEM rep acknowledged this consideration but stated that JEM is in a one-sided battle with the GoS and needs to protect itself accordingly. He said that JEM, while not against the incoming UN-AU Mission in Darfur (UNAMID) forces, could not fully support UNAMID's presence in JEM-controlled areas until the AU and UN undertook consultation with the JEM on UNAMID's mandate first. In particular, JEM opposes the provisions of UNAMID's mandate to uphold the Darfur Peace Agreement (DPA), to which JEM is not a signatory. FieldOff reminded JEM rep that UNSCR 1769 addresses not only the DPA but also any outcome from subsequent Darfur peace talks (UNSCR 1769, OP1).

¶5. (SBU) COMMENT: JEM's latest threat, albeit nothing new, is worrisome, particularly with regard to humanitarian movements in West Darfur, which are dependent on air operations due to insecurity precluding land travel. Equally worrisome is the claim that the GoS is using white aircraft to transport weapons. According to AMIS, SLM/Minawi's commanders made similar allegations recently and also threatened to shoot down aircraft believed to be operated by the Sudanese military. JEM's threat is indicative of rising JEM-GoS tensions, exacerbated by the continued detention of JEM leader Hamad Hasan Mohamed, whose whereabouts in West Darfur remain unknown. JEM is also frustrated with the AU, which has been slow to respond to the detention.

¶6. (SBU) Tripoli minimize considered.

